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U.S. Says the Chernenko Speech Hints Door May Be Open to Talks

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 13 — The United States said today that it welcomed some apparently conciliatory comments in the speech by the new Soviet leader, Konstantin U. Chernenko. American officials said the comments suggested that the door might be open to reviving a Soviet-American dialogue.

Senior Reagan Administration officials said Mr. Chernenko's speech, which he gave after being chosen as the new General Secretary of the Communist Party, broke no major new ground. But they said it appeared to respond indirectly to President Reagan's call for a new "constructive dialogue."

Several Soviet affairs specialists with close ties to United States intelligence singled out a statement by Mr. Chernenko that the Kremlin was ready to "assist through practical deeds in lessening international tensions."

The senior Administration officials said they expected Mr. Chernenko to move cautiously in foreign affairs and rely, perhaps more than had any previous Soviet leader, on collective decisions within the ruling Politburo.

Nevertheless, the intelligence officials, who are experts on the Soviet Union, said Mr. Chernenko appeared solidly committed to the policy of détente fostered by Leonid I. Brezhnev. Mr. Chernenko was Mr. Brezhnev's protégé.

The intelligence officials said Mr. Chernenko, 72 years old, who was a participant in the last Soviet-American summit meeting, set a more moderate tone by avoiding detailed criticism of American policy on any issue.

Late this afternoon, President Reagan arrived at the Soviet Embassy in Washington and signed the condolence book that was opened to the public this morning. The White House said Mr. Reagan signed this message:

"Please accept my condolences on the death of Chairman Andropov and convey my sympathy to his family."

The White House said Mr. Reagan also signed a similar book after the

death of Mr. Brezhnev in 1982.

The State Department, in a statement that deliberately avoided any mention of Mr. Chernenko's criticism of "some leaders of the capitalist countries," said, "We do of course welcome his expressed support for solving international disputes through negotiation."

A Sense of Opportunity

In the last months of Yuri V. Andropov's tenure, substantive talks between the two countries virtually ceased and relations seemed to harden on both sides. Now, on the basis of President Reagan's emphasis in the last month on opening serious talks and the hints in Mr. Chernenko's speech, the mood within the Administration is clearly one of sensing that an opportunity might develop, even though most experts say they do not anticipate any major shifts in Soviet policy.

Vice President Bush, who will be in Moscow for the Andropov funeral on Tuesday, has asked to see Mr. Chernenko, and State Department officials said Mr. Bush was authorized to stress the Administration's desire for negotiations that might lead to a summit meeting.

'Bottomed Out in Relations'

"I think we have bottomed out in relations," one senior State Department official said, "and we're probably going to see a gradual probing on both sides, leading perhaps to enough progress to warrant a meeting between Reagan and the Soviet leaders later in the year."

The official said he used the term "Soviet leaders" because it was possible that Mr. Chernenko may have to share power with someone else in charge of the Government, as took place in the first years of Mr. Brezhnev's tenure.

American analysts of Soviet affairs, in examining the text of Mr. Chernenko's speech, said they were struck by the lack of any direct criticism of either the United States or Mr. Reagan. His criticism instead pointed at "some leaders of the capitalist countries." Mr. Andropov, in his statements in recent months, often singled out the Reagan Administration for attack.

He Backs 'Peaceful Settlement'

Mr. Chernenko said the Soviet Union was "for a peaceful settlement of all disputable international problems through serious, equal and constructive talks."

"The U.S.S.R.," he said, "will cooperate in full measure with all states which are prepared to assist through practical deeds to lessening international tensions and creating an atmosphere of trust in the world."

The State Department statement said: "As the President has stated, these are our goals as well. What is needed is to move from words to deeds in building a more constructive U.S.-Soviet relationship."

Mr. Chernenko has built his career in Communist Party ranks as a senior apparatchik, mostly under the direct patronage of Mr. Brezhnev. He first met Mr. Brezhnev in Soviet Moldavia after World War II, when Mr. Brezhnev headed the party there. He followed Mr. Brezhnev to Moscow and had several jobs within the party Central Committee, in effect becoming the senior administrative official in the party.

Visited U.S. in 1960's

• Mr. Brezhnev promoted him in the late 1970's to become a party secretary and then to be a member of the ruling Politburo. In the late 1960's, American officials said, Mr. Chernenko made an unpublicized visit to the United States to study modern management techniques and data processing, at a time when the Soviet Union was beginning to give priority to introducing advanced management into their society.

During that visit, Mr. Chernenko went to the Bureau of Census for a discussion with senior officials about the use of computers and data processing, according to Murray Feshbach, a senior research scholar at Georgetown University's Center for Demographic Research, who was then the Census Bureau's top expert on the Soviet Union.

"I remember him asking several questions that seemed germane and appropriate," Mr. Feshbach said.

Over all, one authority on Soviet affairs said today, Mr. Chernenko has developed the reputation of being a "team player." Mr. Brezhnev relied on him completely, the analyst said, and they seemed to be good friends as well as associates.

Mr. Chernenko lived in an apartment one floor below Mr. Brezhnev's in the special apartment house for top Soviet officials on Kutuzovsky Prospekt in Moscow. Mr. Andropov also lived in the same building and was apparently close to both men as well.